



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA  
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
DARRELL V. MCGRAW, JR.  
CONSUMER PROTECTION DIVISION  
1-800-368-8808 or 304-558-8986

# Press Release

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## COMPANIES SELLING CASKETS DOOR-TO-DOOR AGREE TO COMPLY WITH THE LAW

Attorney General Darrell V. McGraw, Jr., has obtained a settlement from two insurance companies and a casket seller, whereby the companies agreed to comply with funeral-industry laws and to offer refunds and debt cancellation to consumers who were sold these products illegally.

Last fall, Attorney General McGraw filed a lawsuit against United National Life Insurance Company of America, United Benefits, and Celestial Burial Case, Inc., alleging that the defendants appeared at consumers' homes uninvited and engaged in door-to-door sales of caskets and other funeral merchandise. Once inside a consumer's home, agents made sales pitches regarding the rising price of funerals, promising consumers good deals if they "locked in" their price the same day.

The Attorney General's lawsuit asked the Court to restrain the three companies from selling their products in West Virginia until they could do so lawfully. All three companies had ignored laws requiring them to obtain licenses to sell these products, and the lawsuit alleged that the defendants engaged in illegal home solicitation practices. In some cases, sales agents forged consumers' signatures on money orders in order to close the sale. Most consumers knew nothing about the money orders until they were shown copies of them by the Attorney General's Office.

When consumers agreed to buy a casket, sales agents filled out life insurance applications to support the purchase. Salesmen also had consumers sign bank drafts, allowing the defendants to take money out of consumers' bank accounts every month. In some instances, salespeople failed to inform consumers that these casket packages would not cover all their funeral needs. Consumers were often left with the impression that they had taken the full burden of funeral arrangements off of their families, when that was not the case.

Finally, the defendants agreed to apply for licenses from Attorney General McGraw's office and to comply with West Virginia law. Judge Louis H. Bloom ordered the companies to adhere to all aspects of the Preneed Funeral Contracts Act. They cannot solicit business at consumers' homes unless invited to do so and, under the order, they promised to stop forging consumer's names. In addition, the defendants must pay restitution to any consumer who wants to cancel the illegal sale. Consumers wishing to keep their purchase of preneed funeral goods may do so.

Attorney General McGraw will send letters to consumers who made these purchases, notifying them of their opportunity for a refund. Any consumer who does not receive his or her letter, but who wants a refund, should call the Attorney General's toll-free hotline at 1-800-368-8808 or 304-558-8986, within the next 60 days.

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